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THE DISAPPEARED

The issue of the disappeared in Argentina is the most controversial and sensitive human rights issue remaining. During the "Dirty War" against subversion an undetermined number of individuals were detained and later disappeared. Responsibility for the disappearances is attributed to security and paramilitary forces, although some disappearances were probably the work of leftists. The number of the disappeared is still in dispute. Some claim that they run between 10,000 and 20,000. Most human rights groups say that recorded disappearances are between 6-7,000. Some 6,600 families have petitioned the government for information concerning the fate of relatives.

In the past two years, there have been no long term disappearances. Some individuals have temporarily disappeared, and three politically related murders occurred in 1982. Human rights groups argue that even temporary disappearances show a readiness of the military to revert to old practices.

The vast majority of the disappeared are now dead. The 1981 certification legislation requires that the President "consider" GOA efforts to "provide information" on the disappeared. We were informed by the Argentine Ministry of Interior that it had provided information (ie. reported deaths) to families in 1,426 cases. This was stated in the 1982 Human Rights Report.

Human rights organizations, such as America's Watch, and Congress have pressed the Department for clarification of its information on the disappeared. America's Watch argues that the information has not been verified by the Embassy or by human rights groups in Argentina. They also argue that the GOA will not produce any real accounting for the disappeared, let alone judicial action against those responsible, and that the military will protect itself by passing an amnesty law thus making any accounting impossible. They conclude that the certification requirement has not been met.

There is no easy solution. In the event of certification it can be shown that disappearances have ceased, but the problems of accounting for the disappeared remain. We will press the GOA for fuller information, but we should realize when making the certification decision, that it is unlikely that the GOA will alter its position on the disappeared to meet our certification requirements.

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